

NATIONAL CHARACTER COUNTS WEEK

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I rise in support of a resolution designating the week of October 19 through 25 as the 2008 "National Character Counts Week." I would also like to recognize and thank my colleague and good friend, Senator CHRIS DODD, for his support of Character Counts and his partnership on numerous legislative issues throughout the years.

Our character is the foundation of who we are as people and how we are perceived by the world. Every day our character and ethics are tested through the decisions we make and the behavior we exhibit. The National Character Counts program focuses on "Six Pillars of Character," which are promoted through school- and community-based character education programs across the country. The six pillars are: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

I have supported Character Counts throughout the years because I believe this program reaches out to all youth and adults, as the Character Counts Coalition states, no matter the individual's race, creed, politics, gender, or wealth. In my home State of New Mexico, we have run many successful Character Counts programs throughout the years. While many schools initiate Character Counts programs there are also many other organizations that develop character-based programming. As I prepare to leave the Senate, I would like to reflect upon some of the tremendous accomplishments of this program and how it continues to affect New Mexicans in a positive way.

This year, the New Mexico Character Education Program, funded by the Partnership in Character Education Federal Grant, included 14 school districts and five charter schools statewide, with 50,726 students participating in 106 schools statewide. Through this program, the "Six Pillars of Character" have become a common thread of communication for students, teachers and parents across the State. In addition, 3,640 coaches, athletic directors and youth sports officials worked, in conjunction with the New Mexico Activities Association, to incorporate the goal of teaching the "Pursuing Victory with Honor" theme to students participating in sports. I am thrilled that schools and communities in New Mexico saw a marked increase in leadership role participation and a change in the school climate: Eugene Field Elementary School in Albuquerque, NM, has seen a decrease in discipline referrals from five per day to five in the school year. All of the organizations and schools who have been involved, including those not mentioned here, are to be commended for their hard work in developing these programs and spreading the message that character truly does count.

In addition to these numbers, which show the remarkable affect Character Counts is having on my home State of New Mexico, there are many individual

stories about how New Mexicans are affecting each other's lives on a day to day basis as a result of this program. One particularly touching story is that of 9-year-old Jacob Thomson, who lives in Clovis, NM. Jacob has cystic fibrosis, and when he missed the big basketball game to go to the hospital for treatment, the Clovis High School basketball team went and visited him in the hospital, bringing him a basketball, a shirt, and a smile. These athletes had been involved with the Character Counts program and displayed what a powerful impact this program has had and continues to have.

During the week of October 19, I hope everyone takes the time to participate in a Character Counts event in their local area. I know in New Mexico we will be having some special celebrations. On October 17, a Character Counts Proclamation will be made at the Chaves County Court House in Roswell, NM. On October 20, Hagerman Elementary School in Hagerman, NM will be dedicating a Character Counts Mural. On October 21, a zoo tour and pillar presentation will be held at Spring River Park for grades 3-5 in Roswell, NM.

I believe this program is making a difference in my home State and across the country. I want to encourage more people to become involved with the Character Counts program, but most of all I hope individuals will take the time to reflect on what the "Six Pillars of Character" mean to them.

I hope all of my colleagues will support this effort.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, today Senator DOMENICI and I introduced a resolution designating the third week of October as "National Character Counts Week." Senator DOMENICI and I have worked together for many years on the issue of character education and hope that by designating a special week to this cause, we may highlight the importance of character building activities in schools not only this week but all year long.

In 1994, Senator DOMENICI and I first established the Partnerships in Character Education Pilot Project and have worked regularly since then to commemorate National Character Counts Week. Character Counts was founded on a simple notion: Our core ethical values aren't just important to us as individuals—they form the very foundation of democratic society. We know that we in order to face our challenges as communities and as a Nation, we need our children to be both well-educated and trained—and that begins with instilling character in our children.

Trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship—these are the six pillars of character. Character education provides students a context within which to learn those values and integrate them into our daily lives. Indeed, if we view education simply as the imparting of knowledge to our children, then we not

only miss an opportunity, but as also jeopardize our future. Children want direction—to be taught right from wrong. Young people yearn for consistent adult involvement, and when they get it, we know they are less inclined to use illegal drugs, to vandalize, or commit suicide. The American public wants character education in our schools, too. Studies show that approximately 90 percent of Americans support schools teaching character education.

Character education programs work. Currently, there are character education programs across all 50 States in rural, urban and suburban areas at every grade level. Schools across the country that have adopted strong character education programs report better student performance, fewer discipline problems, and increased student involvement within the community.

Support for character education crosses party lines. Indeed, there is no stronger advocate for character education than my good friend, Senator PETE DOMENICI. I have had the distinct pleasure of working with him to ensure that all our children not only acquire strong math and science skills, but also the skills they need to develop into good and decent human beings.

Senator DOMENICI has worked tirelessly on behalf of our Nation's children, and as he winds down his career in the Senate, I would like to take a moment to thank him for his good work and friendship. He will be sorely missed in the halls of this building, and we all wish his wife, Nancy, and him the very best.

This renewed focus on character sends a wonderful message to Americans and will help reinvigorate our efforts to get communities and schools involved. With this resolution, it is my hope that even more communities will make character education a part of every child's life. I hope that my colleagues will support this important effort.

ORDER FOR PRINTING OF SENATE DOCUMENT

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the tributes to retiring Senators that appear in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD be printed as a Senate document and that Senators be permitted to submit such tributes for inclusion until Friday, November 21, 2008.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.